

Media Framing of Covid-19 Pandemic: A Study of *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* Newspapers in Nigeria

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The wide-spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) in Nigeria in the last few months has attracted media attention and generated reports. The disease which causes respiratory illness like the flu with symptoms such as cough, fever and in more severe cases, difficulty in breathing has been ravaging the country. Since the Nigerian Government announced the first confirmed novel coronavirus pandemic in the country on February 27th 2020, the media in Nigeria have been giving extensive coverage on the issue using different frames. This paper sought to determine the types of frames, the tones of the frames, the dominant frames, considering the selected newspapers are based in the two ends of the geographical cardinal points of the country (North and South). The paper is limited to only newspaper frames and not the audience perspective of the issues of framing. This paper examines the ways *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* framed Covid-19 and the implication of the frames on government interest. The paper further looked at the possible implication of the frames on government interest in respect of the virus. Through content analysis, a census of dataset of articles, representing the coverage of Covid-19 is used for the study. The paper is anchored on the theoretical lens of Framing Theory which hinged on the premise of philosophical postulation that provides explanation on which news content is typically shaped and contextualized by media outlet. The findings of the study indicate that the media narratives within the study period tilted more on economic and political frames. The tones of the frames of both newspapers are more of negative frames than positive and neutral on the Covid-19 pandemic. This study concludes that *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspaper framed the Covid-19 pandemic more of economic, political and downplaying important frames such as health and safety and quality of life frames.

Keywords: Covid-19, Daily Trust, framing, media, Nigeria and Vanguard

INTRODUCTION

The wide-spread of coronavirus (Covid-19) in Nigeria in the last few months has attracted media attention and generated reports. The Covid-19 that started out as an epidemic in Wuhan, China in December 2019 and ended up as a pandemic (affecting the whole

world) has thrown the world into a war-like situation. Thousands of deaths have been recorded cumulatively for all countries across the world. Health systems in most countries are overwhelmed by the seriously sick patients in hospitals, many of whom are

on ventilators and nursed in intensive care units (ICU). Global and local economies stand at their worst in decades; the world economy is now declared to be in recession by the World Bank and IMF, and could eventually lead to the deepest depression (Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, 2020).

Sadly, the first case of Covid-19 was confirmed on the 27 February 2020 in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital with a population of 21 million. The index case arrived from Milan, Italy, then the fourth country with high incidence (371 cases), and came into the country through Lagos Airport on 25 February 2020 where nothing serious was on ground to check or track new entrants into the country from suspected places with acute infections. The fellow, who works with the multibillion dollars multinational, Lafarge Cement Company, went for a meeting at the company's factory at Ewekoro, Ogun state, an adjoining state to Lagos. It was at the Lafarge's medical centre in Ewekoro that the case was flagged when he presented sick, and was sent for testing and confirmed Covid-19 (Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, 2020).

More cases were thereafter discovered, a number of them being high ranking politicians and senior government officials. Among them were President Buhari's Chief of Staff, Abba Kyari; the Governors of Bauchi, Kaduna and Oyo States; the nation's Comptroller General and Head of Immigration; Deputy Speaker of Edo State House of Assembly and son of former Vice President Atiku Abubakar. It was on record that these political elites clearly refused to follow the public health advice of social distancing and a minimum of 14-day self-isolation expected of all recent travelers, which invariably led to infection of their contacts, and of course their contacts' contacts. This no doubt contributed to the leap in Covid-19 cases (World Health Organization, 2020).

Nigeria which is the most populous country on the continent with an estimated population of 200 million has 4641 confirmed cases of Covid-19 and 150 deaths as of 11 May 2020. These numbers are far from the true reflection of the situation in Nigeria, based on the fact that testing is not being carried out on a large scale. The Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) stated earlier in the month that the present testing volume is 500 tests per day and hoped to increase this capacity to 1000 or more tests per day (World Health Organization, 2020).

The overall death counts for the Covid-19 pandemic, within its short history, remain unprecedented in modern times since the 1918

Spanish flu pandemic that affected 500 million of the then 1.5 billion world population and led to millions of deaths including hundreds of thousands of deaths in the then Nigerian population of 18 million. But 1918 was more than a century ago; that was a period when the world did not have anything near the present level of sophistication of modern medicine and intensive care practice. As of 12 April 2020, the United States had become the country with the highest number of Covid-19 confirmed cases with an incidence of over 500,000 cases and more than 23,000 deaths. Italy has fatalities with about 20,000 deaths from 160,000 cases, Spain with 17,000 deaths from 170,000 cases. France had recorded almost 12,000 deaths from 118,000 cases while China had 3,339 deaths from 82,883 cases (Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, 2020).

The number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in 52 countries in Africa, as of 9 April 2020, is put at 12,368; a very small fraction (0.8%) of the world's total. Africa's confirmed Covid-19 death toll is put at 632 (0.7%) of the world's coronavirus related deaths for the same date. South Africa accounts for the highest number of confirmed cases at 1,934 with 11 related deaths. Also, African countries closest to Europe and the Middle East account for half of the Covid-19 cases on the continent. Most of the cases and deaths, occurred in four North African countries, Algeria (1666), Egypt (1699), Morocco (1374) and Tunisia (643) with 80% (4 out of 5) of the total Covid-19 related deaths in Africa.

It is evident that there was really no preparation to arrest the earliest cases of importation of Covid-19 into the country which could have been done at the points of entry into the country, especially at the international airports. Effective quarantine of travelers coming into the country, since the Chinese outbreak became news in January could have been done. It was not until much later, by 18 March 2020, that Nigeria eventually placed a travel ban on 13 countries with high incidence of the disease viz., the United States, United Kingdom, South Korea, Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy, China, Spain, Netherlands, Norway, Japan and Iran. It was later that the ban of all international flights into and out of Nigeria took effect on 23 March 2020. This uncoordinated approach came rather late as many returnees had already melted into the communities.

Within this context, it is apparent to understand that one way of keeping in touch with our contemporary world is through the media. Communication is a vital component in human lives and existence and no

society has been known to exist without it. It is the exchange of ideas, views, information, experiences and the sharing of meanings between person, nation societies and cultures (Ekeanyanwu, 2005). The media are often in liberal theory referred to as the “Fourth Estate of the Realm” and the “watchdog of the society”, meaning that the media exist as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, educational promotion, surveillance, social enlightenment, and mobilization. These functions set the media apart as an important link or factor in the relationship between the government and the governed and make them a sine-qua-non to societal growth and development.

Therefore, considering the trends and the dynamics of the media in handling the issue, it becomes imperative to examine the framing of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria by the selected Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspapers since the first case of Covid-19 was announced on 27 February 2020 in Lagos, Nigeria. The paper is limited to only newspaper frames and not the audience perspectives of the issues of framing. The objectives of the study are:

- i. to determine the types of frames used by *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspapers on the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ii. to determine the tones of the frames (positive, negative, and neutral) on the Covid-19 pandemic.
- iii. to identify the dominant frame on the Covid-19 pandemic.
- iv. to determine the implication of the tones.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Framing by the media are usually presented in different types of media content. Nisbet (2009) is of the view that, framing constitutes important part of the media that contributes to shaping the audience perception and societal disposition to event covered by the media. It is a modality that the media organizations adopt in selecting and presenting its content so as to produce various perspectives for audience selection (Jibrin, 2019). Framing enables the presentation of news content in various ways, producing different versions, for the purpose of emphasis or enhancing the important of issues and events (Jibrin, 2019).

Framing emphasizes the issue of methods through which the media streamline and present news content. Media organizations adopt framing to simply

complex issues to make room for audience to easily understand and form opinion about the issue through text, pictures or symbols (Tolley, 2016). Through news frames the media provide important information and knowledge which often influence public or audience opinion and decision (Ofori-Birikorang, 2010). Framing can sway public opinion on an issue which they have significant consequences for how the public view and understand an issue, and they respond to it (Chime-Nganya et al., 2017).

Framing showcases how societal issues are portrayed and how messages are encoded with meaning by the media so that they can be easily decoded vis-à-vis existing idea (Chilisa, 2012). The media present and determine what is and is not worth presenting, or reporting as news. Entman in Jibrin (2019) describes framing as essentially involves selection and salience. According to him:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation for the item described (p. 36).

Understanding framing is further strengthened by the categorization that helps provide specific perspectives on issues that requires large-scale text data analysis beyond manual annotation alone. News media generally use the main kinds of frames: episodic and thematic. Episodic news frames are mostly frames on news media that shows public issues in terms of concrete instances, focusing on events that involve individuals located at specific places, and at specific times (Gyong, 2013). The thematic news frames place public issues in a broader context by emphasizing on general conditions (Mato, 2012).

Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017) identified factors that influence the pattern of frame. For instance, the outbreak of a disease could create a pattern of frame. Disease has shown that media public attention broadens to a variety of dimension causes and solutions in respect of frame dominant in the Nigeria media. Amber et al., (2013) research on framing has benefitted from some well-established frame categorizations that is generalized across issues. For example, Iyengar in Jibrin (2019) identifies episodic frames which concentrate on specific incidents or cases as different from thematic frames which focuses on larger trends or context. These influence on public attitudes or reactions. Amber et al., (2013) further note that:

People who consume stories about poverty that are framed episodically by focusing on unemployed individuals are more likely to blame poverty on individual failings and people who consume thematic poverty stories, focused on national unemployment rates, are more likely to blame poverty on the government or other forces beyond an individual's control (P.3).

Other frame categories are issue specific. Although the issue-specific categories or schemes do not allow for examining patterns, they however, provide details. Amber et al., (2013) identified another type of frame, which is the innocence frame. The innocence frame emerged in the mid-1990, accompanied by the emergence of frames related to evidence, due process, classism and racism which all gained attention on the platforms of the innocence frame.

For policy-based issues, Amber et al., (2013, p. 4) note that there is a Policy Frames Codebook which is intended to provide a general system for categorizing frames across policy issues. 14 categories of frame dimensions are contained alongside "other" category that are intended to be applicable to any policy issue such as "abortion, immigration, foreign aid, etc., and in any communication context (news stories, Twitter, party manifestos, legislative debates), etc." Therefore, the Covid-19 could be suitable for determining the types of frames used by the selected media in the study. This is so because the outbreak of Covid-19 has generated media reports which in turn have generated reactions from the public. How the media have represented and shaped the discourse on the Covid-19 is central to the media since it is an event that is tied to issue of a prolonged disease across the globe. Frames are keys in reporting whichever perspectives the media organization deems suitable.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

The paper is anchored on Framing Theory. Framing as a theory is credited to Gregory Bateson as first posited in 1972. Framing Theory is a platform for the media to situate various perspective of an occurrence that is newsworthy. It is sometimes referred to as second-level Agenda Setting, because it has a close relationship to Agenda Setting theory. Framing refers to how the media organize and present information to the public on certain issues, or event and giving them particular context to sway interpretation and necessitating selective influence over how members

of the public view reality. Framing Theory is a philosophical postulation that provides explanation on which news content is typically shaped and contextualized by a media outlet (McQuail, 2005). According to Goffman in Jibrin (2019) frames are cognitive structures that guide the representation of events. In framing, the media devote volume of coverage to a particular issue. The media through framing make an issue salient and direct audience attention to specific issues, ideas and individuals while downplaying what lies outside the frame (Boykoff and Laschever, 2011). In terms of frame tone, Greenslade (2015) noted that much of media coverage tilt towards the negative than the positive. It is noticeable that media in respect of the Covid-19 hyped the consequences focusing more on the danger of the spread of the virus across countries and continent. In this context, there is a nexus between the study and the theory because the media frame stories and such stories or words depend on the content producers which portend to issues like Covid-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a content analysis. *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspapers were purposively selected based on their ownership and location. Considering the wide-spread and the dimension outrage that railed the Covid-19 pandemic in the country and how it appears on pages of newspapers like *Daily Trust*, and *Vanguard* newspapers. This study built on a database of articles, representing the coverage of the Covid-19 which was first announced on the 27 February 2020 in Lagos, Nigeria. The selected period noticeably marked the peak of national discourse on the Covid-19 pandemic. The database includes news and feature articles published in the two newspapers. A census method was used; hence a Google and websites search of the selected newspapers were conducted for available stories during the period under study. The search phrase "media framing of coronavirus"; "media framing of Covid-19" were used to search for articles. Other forms of search adopted were the use of keywords "Covid-19 + each of the selected newspaper's name + February, March, April and May 2020." The search platforms, or window on each newspaper websites were found from the search within the study period.

Frames Categories: the content categories for the

study is deductive from Jibrin (2019) Frames Schemes of Frames:

Tones of Frames

- a. Positive: frames that are favorable and generally sympathetic point of view to the Covid-19.
- b. Negative: frames that are unfavorable and a non-sympathetic point of view to Covid-19.
- c. Neutral: articles that are neither in any of the two types described above. News article does not appear to discuss the issue either positively or negatively.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Total Number of Frames

The study through the search frames explained in the method section found a total of 136 frames that touched Covid-19 pandemic. These frames cut across newspaper articles (headlines and contents) that had the search phrase or keywords and limited to February 27th to May 14th 2020.

Table 2 showed the number of frames found in the selected newspapers. *Daily Trust* records the highest number of frames with (55.1%) that relate to Covid-19 pandemic. *Vanguard* newspaper has (44.8%). The data indicate that the two newspapers under investigation cover and report the issue and thus framing it from their own perspectives.

Table 3 shows the appearance of the categories or types of frames. Some of the unit content appear in two or more categories and thus were coded in the various categories. For instance, some content fell in the economic frames, political frames and external regulation and reputation frames. The table shows that the two newspapers have more economic, political and external regulation and reputation frames. *Daily Trust* has more on economic frames while *Vanguard* has more on political frames. This indicates that the media narratives within the study period tilted more on economic and political frames.

Table 4 shows the tones of the frames used by the selected newspapers. Based on the findings, both papers had more negative tones than the positive and neutral in framing the Covid-19 pandemic. This means that there were more negative frames. *Daily Trust* has more negative than *Vanguard* newspaper. This could be as a result of high rate of Covid-19 pandemic in the North than Southern part of Nigeria.

The study shows that the media irrespective of locations are influenced by the gravity of event and how it affects a nation. This is evident in the tones of the frames of both newspapers having more of negative frames than positive and neutral on the Covid-19 pandemic. The implication of the findings as shown in Tables 3 and 4 is that despite the efforts of the selected newspapers in framing stories on Covid-19, a lot need to be done to gain government and public support on Covid-19 pandemic since the stories framed by the selected papers are negative and in form of economic and political oriented. The findings of the study coincided with the position of Greenslade (2015) who notes that much of the media coverages are tilted towards the negative than the positive.

Table 5 shows the dominant frame used by the selected newspapers and such frames focused on the economic frame which occurred 30 times. This means that the selected papers give more attention to the economic to undertone the Covid-19 pandemic by subjecting it to economic interpretation which may pose a greater danger in countries like Nigeria which do not have proper and robust health infrastructure. This means that the Covid-19 outbreak has generated both demand and supply shocks reverberating across the global economy. This perhaps explain the reason why Nisbet (2009) is of the view that, framing constitutes important part of the media that contributes to shaping the audience perception and societal disposition to event covered by the media.

Implication

The implication of the findings in table three, four, and five is that the danger posed by Covid-19 will affect the economy of the country greatly. Evidence from the findings show that through media framing of the issue, people's psyche has been conditioned to view the Covid-19 pandemic from the economic and political point of view. Based on the direction of the media framing, Nigerian citizens especially off North did not believe in the virus rather, they look at it from the economic and political point of view. This is in line with the position of Dimitrova and Stromback (2005); and Ofori-Birikorang (2010) that through framing, the media provide important information and knowledge which often influence public or audience opinion and decision. The implication is that by constant framing of stories by the media, people can incline in that direction and their mind can be conditioned to believe

Table 1. Content Categories.

SN	Content Categories	Definition
1.	Economic frames	The cost, or monetary or financial implications of the issue (to an individual, family, community, or to the economy as a whole)
2.	Capacity and resources frames	The lack of or availability of physical, geographical, spatial, human and financial resources or, the capacity of exiting systems and resources to implement or carry out policy goals.
3.	Morality frames	Any perspective or policy objective or action (including proposed action) that is compelled by religious doctrine or interpretation, duty, honour, righteousness or any other sense of ethics or social responsibility
4.	Fairness and equality frames	Equality or inequality with which laws, punishment, rewards and resources are applied or distributed among individuals or groups. Also, the balance between the right or interests of one individual or group compared to another individual or group.
5.	Constitutionality and jurisprudence frames	The constraints imposed on or freedoms granted to individuals, government and corporations via the Constitution, Bill of Rights and other amendments or judicial interpretation. This deals specifically with the authority of government to regulate and the authority of individuals or corporations to act independently of government.
6.	Policy prescription and evaluation	Particular policies proposed for addressing an identified problem and figuring out if certain policies will work or if existing policies are effective.
7.	Law and order, crime and evaluation	Specific policies in practice and their enforcement, incentives, and implications. Includes stories about enforcement and interpretation of laws by individuals and law enforcement, breaking laws, loopholes, fines, sentencing and punishment. Increases or reduction in crime.
8.	Security and defence frames	Security, threats to security and protection of one's person, family, in-group, nation, etc. generally, an action or a call to action that can be taken to protect the welfare of a person, group, nation sometimes from a not yet manifested threat.
9.	Health and safety frames	Healthcare access and effectiveness, illness, disease, sanitation, obesity, mental health effects, prevention of or perpetuation of gun violence, infrastructure and building safety.
10.	Quality of life frames	The effects of a policy on individuals' wealth, mobility, access to resources, happiness, social structures, ease of day-to-day routines, quality of community life, etc.
11.	Cultural identify frames	The social norms, trends, values and customs constituting culture(s), as they relate to a specific policy issue.
12.	Public opinion frames	References to general social attitudes, polling and demographic information, as well as implied or actual consequences of diverging from or getting ahead of public opinion or polls.
13.	Political frames	Any political considerations surrounding an issue. Issue actions or efforts or stances that are political, such as partisan filibusters, lobbyist involvement, bipartisan efforts, deal-making and vote trading, appealing to one's base, mentions of political maneuvering. Explicit statements that a policy issue is good or bad for a particular political party.
14.	External regulation and reputation frames	The external relations of one state with another or relations between groups. This includes trade agreements and outcomes, comparisons of policy outcomes or desired policy outcomes.
15.	Other frames	Any frames that do not fit into the above categories.

Table 2. Total Number of Frames on Covid-19 pandemic in *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* Newspapers.

Newspapers	Number of Frames	Percentages (%)
<i>Daily Trust</i>	75	55.1
<i>Vanguard</i>	61	44.8
Total	136	100

Source: Author's field work, 2020

Table 3. Types of Frames Used by *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* on Covid-19 Pandemic.

Frames Categories	Newspapers	
	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>
Economic frames	16	14
Capacity and resources frames	9	7
Morality frames	0	1
Fairness and equality frames	0	0
Constitutionality and jurisprudence frames	2	3
Policy prescription and evaluation	8	9
Law and order, crime and justice frames	3	3
Security and defence frames	5	2
Health and safety frames	7	6
Quality of life frames	0	0
Cultural identify frames	4	1
Public opinion frames	7	5
Political frames	13	15
External regulation and reputation frames	11	10
Other frames	0	0

Source: Author's field work, 2020.

Table 4. Tones of Frames on the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Tones of Frames	Newspapers	
	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>
Positive	24	22
Negative	39	31
Neutral	12	8

Source: Author's field work, 2020.

what the media are projecting or setting agenda on. This validate the theoretical assumption of Media Framing which postulates that through framing, the

media make an issue salient and direct audience attention to specific issues, ideas and individuals while downplaying what lies outside the frame.

Table 5. Dominant Frame on the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Frames Categories	Newspapers		
	<i>Daily Trust</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Total
Economic frames	16	14	30
Capacity and resources frames	9	7	16
Morality frames	0	1	1
Fairness and equality frames	0	0	0
Constitutionality and jurisprudence frames	2	3	5
Policy prescription and evaluation	8	9	17
Law and order, crime and justice frames	3	3	6
Security and defence frames	5	2	7
Health and safety frames	7	6	13
Quality of life frames	0	0	0
Cultural identify frames	4	1	5
Public opinion frames	7	5	12
Political frames	13	15	28
External regulation and reputation frames	11	10	21
Other frames	0	0	0

Source: Author's field work, 2020.

CONCLUSION

The media play a pivotal role in framing issues that have to do with public interest. The media irrespective of location present an issue the way they find it suitable for several reasons. The Covid-19 pandemic shows how media sway narratives. This study concludes that *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard* newspaper framed the Covid-19 pandemic more of economic and political and downplaying important frames such as health and safety and quality of life frames. Therefore, the media would continue to frame issues irrespective of where they occur in perspectives that suits their interest. The way the media organized and present information to the public on certain issues or event and giving them particular context to sway interpretation and necessitating selective influence on how members of the public view reality.

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